



ROBERT GRAY

The Pilot of *Whiskey Pete*

He was a bomber pilot who spent only two-and-a-half years in the Air Corps. He died before his 24th birthday. The US Air Force base that bore his name no longer exists.

Yet no one who knows his story has forgotten Capt. Robert Manning Gray, revered member of the famed Doolittle Raiders. Gray joined up with then-Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle in April 1942 to strike Japan a blow in the darkest days of World War II. He left an indelible mark.

Gray was born May 24, 1919, in Killeen, Texas. At Tarleton College, he earned a private pilot's license while serving in the Reserve Officer's Training Corps.

Gray left college in June 1940 to enter the US Air Corps' Aviation Cadet Program, and within a year, he earned his wings and was commissioned a second lieutenant. He was soon flying B-25 bombers.

In February 1942, then-First Lieutenant Gray was selected to take part in the planned raid on Japan.

On April 18, 1942, the Doolittle Raiders and their 16 B-25s were aboard USS *Hornet* off Japan. Gray's B-25—he named it *Whiskey Pete*, after a horse—was third off the carrier. No. 3 approached Tokyo at low level, popped up, and dropped three 500-pound bombs.

The first struck a steel plant. The second made a direct hit on a gas works. The third hit a chemical plant, setting it on fire. For good measure, Gray shot up a barracks on the way out.

As planned, Gray turned toward China. He searched for a friendly airfield, but the B-25 ran out of fuel and the crew bailed out over China. Gray, the last to jump, did so at 6,200 feet and landed on a mountain peak.

Gray evaded capture and linked up with several *Whiskey Pete* crew members. Cpl. Leland Dale Faktor, No. 3's engineer-gunner, was killed in the jump, but the others made it to safety in Chunking.

Following the raid, Gray was promoted to captain. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, whose citation noted that Gray "volunteered for this mission knowing full well that the chances of survival were extremely remote."

Gray stayed in the China-Burma-India Theater, based in India. He was killed on Oct. 18, 1942, when his B-25 bomber crashed during a combat mission over Assam, near Burma. His remains were returned to the US and were buried in Killeen.

Hollywood in 1944 turned out "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo," the first film about the raid. Gray was portrayed by Robert Mitchum.

To honor Gray, USAF in 1948 gave his name to a new flying facility near Killeen, Robert Gray Air Force Base. It was built to handle heavy bombers and was used to support Killeen Base, a nearby nuclear weapons storage site.

Robert Gray Air Force Base existed for some 15 years. In June 1963, USAF relinquished control to the Army, which promptly renamed it Robert Gray Army Airfield. The name persists today.

ROBERT MANNING GRAY

Born: May 24, 1919, Killeen, Texas
Died: Oct. 18, 1942 (KIA), Assam, India
Colleges: Tarleton College, Texas A&M
Occupation: US military officer
Service: US Air Corps, US Army Air Forces
Era: World War II
Years Active: 1940-42
Combat: Pacific Theater, China-Burma-India Theater
Final Grade: Captain
Honors: Distinguished Flying Cross; Chinese Medal of Honor
Famous Friend: Jimmy Doolittle

ROBERT GRAY AIR FORCE BASE

State: Texas
Nearest City: Killeen
Area: 18.75 sq mi / 12,000 acres
USAF Status: Closed
Opened: (by Air Force) 1947
Prior Names: Killeen Army Airfield, Camp Hood Army Airfield
Named as Air Force Base: Robert Gray AFB (February 1948)
Closed: (by USAF) June 1963
Reopened: (by Army) 1963
Renamed: Robert Gray Army Airfield (1963)
Adjacent To: Fort Hood, Texas
Home Of: 1st Cavalry Division, 1st Air Combat Brigade
USAF Presence: None

1. Crew of No. 3 (l-r): 2nd Lt. Charles Ozuk (navigator), 1st Lt. Robert Gray (pilot), Sgt. Aden Jones (bombardier), 2nd Lt. Jacob Manch (copilot), and Cpl. Leland Faktor (engineer-gunner). 2. Gray as an ROTC member. 3. Army Gray Eagle RPAs in a maintenance hangar at the airfield. 4. Soldiers load a helicopter onto an Air Force C-17 at Robert Gray Army Airfield.